

Attachment 6.3

Quality, Scope, And Extent Of Supported Employment Services

The Supported Employment (SE) Program provides services to individuals with the most significant disabilities who require intensive support to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment. The services are designed to meet the current and future needs of these individuals whose disabilities are of such a nature that they need continuous, on-going support and extended services in order to engage in and maintain gainful employment. SE services include evaluation, assessment, job matching, job development, job placement, job coaching, brokering and training for natural supports to include extended services and other comprehensive follow along supports.

Eligible individuals are those who are determined to be "most significantly" disabled, which means they meet the following criteria:

- individual has a "significant disability"
- individual's physical or mental impairments seriously limit two (2) or more functional capacities in terms of an employment outcome
- individual will require vocational rehabilitation services in order to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) employs a unique strategy for delivery of SE services. The SE Program's structure and service delivery mechanism are integrated into that of the general agency service delivery system. The services are authorized, coordinated and, in most instances, delivered by staff of the state unit. Counselors who specialize in supported employment perform the functions of case management, job development, and supervision of overall supported employment service delivery in their respective districts. They are assisted by Vocational Training Instructors (VTIs) who perform a variety of functions including assessment, job development and placement, job training, job coach supervision, and facilitation of natural supports. Job coaches are employed on an "as needed" basis. Counselors are assigned to serve SE eligible individuals in each of the 10 districts in order to ensure statewide coverage. The SE staff includes 10 Counselors, 12 VTIs and a pool of available Job Coaches who are assigned to work with an SE client as needed. This staff works with MDRS' statewide community rehabilitation program, AbilityWorks, Inc.

MDRS contends that its responsibility regarding supported employment is the same as its responsibility for the general program. The SE programs for both the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (VRB) have been combined into one program serving all eligible individuals. SE counselors have the same duties and responsibilities as those in the VR and VRB programs. However, the caseloads of the SE counselors consist of only those clients who meet Title VI, Part B eligibility criteria. Therefore, in addition to general agency policy and procedures, SE staff members must be knowledgeable about Title VI, Part B regulations and the unique requirements for supported employment

eligibility. Additionally, SE staff members are provided clerical support in the same proportion as the VR program staff.

Administration and implementation of the SE Program is assigned to the Bureau of Client Services within the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. SE personnel are trained in general vocational rehabilitation case management techniques and Title I regulations and are held to the same procedures and standards of performance, as are general counselors.

MDRS designates a SE statewide program coordinator whose duties include the following:

- monitor issues developing in the field of supported employment
- serve as a resource person to staff
- serve as advisor to administrative staff in implementing programmatic policies in accordance with federal dictates
- develop effective programmatic procedures
- recommend training of SE staff
- other typical functions of a coordinating and liaison nature

MDRS maintains formal agreements with the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) and the Mississippi Department of Mental Health as well as other public and private entities, which identify areas of collaboration to ensure a comprehensive program of services to SE eligible individuals. Staff members collaborate intensively with local mental health centers (MHC), school districts, SE businesses and industries, the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities, parents, advocacy groups and other relevant third parties.

The service approach for SE eligible clients emulates the nationally accepted "best practices" models of SE service delivery which include individual job placement, mobile crews, and temporary employment placement (TEP) for individuals with chronic mental illness. Central to each of these approaches is an emphasis on person centered planning and facilitation of natural supports. Individualized job development is conducted by SE staff based on job matching assessment information and client's informed choice. SE clients are assisted with employment planning and placement by VTIs and job skills training is provided at the job site either by job coaches or through natural supports.

To fulfill the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act regarding transitional employment for individuals with chronic mental illness, MDRS utilizes the TEP model. This model involves placement in a series of temporary jobs that lead to permanent employment as an outcome. This service approach is implemented through coordination with local MHCs.

Upon completion of time-limited SE services, the ongoing job skills training assistance and other necessary long-term support is transitioned to a third party, group or individual through a Cooperative Agreement or Extended Service Agreement. MDRS currently has more than 500 such agreements in effect and expects this number to increase each year. Although 18 months of time-limited services is maintained as a standard, the rate of transitioning a client to extended

services is dependent upon the needs of the individual, their families, the employer, the third party agency and other involved individuals. Since SE staff members and the extended service provider will have been collaborating in the provision of SE services throughout an individual's vocational rehabilitation program, such transitions are normally smooth and do not cause job disruptions.

MDRS will continue to cooperate in the networking of services with entities that have supported employment facets or other applicable and/or similar resources, such as the state's Workforce Investment Act One-Stop System. Such collaborative efforts are essential for effective planning, development, implementation and continuation of supported employment arrangements. Service networking will involve developing and identifying appropriate job sites, tapping existing or future job training resources, utilizing concurrent staffing opportunities, and other occasions for programmatic and budgetary interfacing.

Expansion of the SE Program is expected as a result of extensive outreach, staff development, interagency training, dissemination of information, identification and dissemination of information about best practices, technical assistance, and an emphasis on interagency collaboration for identification of potentially eligible individuals and service delivery to clients. MDRS continues to emphasize person centered planning by partnering with the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities, MDE, and other entities in promotion of this service provision.

This attachment was developed after a review of the results of the Statewide Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs. Any pertinent findings from the Statewide Assessment were incorporated into this attachment. Additionally, members of the State Rehabilitation Council were involved in the development of this attachment.